

Thesis of a DLA Dissertation

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The 18th-century Russian Choral Concerto in the Art of M. S. Berezovsky,
D. S. Bortniansky and A. L. Vedel

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I. The antecedents of the research

The topic of my doctoral thesis is the genre of the 18th-century Russian church choral concerto, especially in the art of three lesser-known composers of Ukrainian birth: Maksym Sozontovych Berezovsky, Dmytry Stepanovych Bortniansky and Artem Lukianovych Vedel.

I selected the topic because of my interest in Russian music. What could precede the work of my appreciated and recognized 19th-century Russian composers? Why could the genre of *a cappella* so popular in that era when they mostly employed the choir in oratorical works in Western Europe?

According to my research, this was an era of crucial importance because it resulted in a significant improvement of the Russian choral arts. It established the work of 19th-century Russian national Romantic composers and served as a model how the stylistic marks of Western European music and the ancient Russian music can be combined even if many of the Russian Romantic authors held aloof from the Western trends.

After starting the research, it soon turned out that this era has almost no Hungarian literature at all. There are some summarizing notes about the history of Russian music, but these only tangentially refer to the age and the career path and activity of the composers, they instead focus on the following periods.

In the meantime, however, I came discovered the works of Marina Ritzarev. Born in 1946, Saint Petersburg the musicologist has researched the 18th-century Russian music for long, she wrote a monograph of Bortniansky in Russian and many studies in this topic in Russian and English.¹ The greatest part of facts was provided by her quite complex book for my dissertation, the title of which: *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*.²

¹ Marina Ritzarev: *Композитор Д. Бортнянский - Жизнь и творчество* (Москва, Музыка 1979), *Russian Music before Glinka, A Look from the Beginning of the Third Millenium*. (Israel, Bar-Ilan University 2002)

² Marina Ritzarev: *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*. (Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006)

II. Sources

The writings mentioned above mainly show the historical background of the era as well as the career path of the composers. The earlier Russian monograph of Bortniansky may be less factual and written more circumstantially. *Eighteenth-Century Russian Music*, however, is the result of an extensive research work, which provides many facts of the 18th-century Russian music with the accurate specification of several sources. The book also includes analyses: from the extracts of operas, instrumental and vocal works – including choral concerti –, but I have not included these in my dissertation, considering that my goal was to discover and present the genre individually and give an overall picture of the style and the specific musical tools of the composers based on my knowledge.

In addition to the works of Marina Ritzarev, the study of S. S. Skrebkov and the writings of Marika Kuzma helped me throughout my discovery. Another very nicely developed anthology – *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки /One thousand Years of Russian Church–*, which presents the history of the Russian sacred vocal music from the beginning up to the 20th century, broken down into genres in Russian and English, was also a big help. Apart from the music, this book also provides many facts about the development of the Russian *a cappella* choral music, the types of polyphony and the formation of notation.³

The most important source of materials – since my thesis is of an analytical nature – were the collections of music themselves which were made available to me in the library of the Kiev Music Academy.⁴ The volumes containing the works of the three composers have different structures, but all of them include sacred, *a cappella* choral works, even also choral concerti. The Bortniansky collection is composed exclusively of these, and it was published again in Moscow, 1995 based on a volume of 1881 revised by Tchaikovsky.⁵

³ *Тысяча лет русской церковной музыки /One thousand Years of Russian Church Music* Washington: Musica russica Dc. Ell., 2007.

⁴ Д. Бортнянский: *35 концертов*. Original edition: P. Tchaikovsky. (Moscow: Muzyka, 1995), Максим Березовский: *Хорові духовні твори*. (Kiev: ed.: M. Yurchenko. First ed.: 1989), Artem Vedel: *Divine Liturgy and 12 Sacred Choral Concerti*. (Published by: Vladimir Kolesnyk, Kiev, Edmonton, Toronto 2000).

⁵While I was working on my dissertation, I found a more recent music sheet including 35 concerti of Bortniansky. This was published by Urtext with the contribution and foreword of Marika Kuzma in Russian, English and German. Dmitry Bortniansky: *35 Geistliche Konzerte für Chor*. Edited by Marika Kuzma. (Stuttgart: Carus Verlag, 2009).

III. Methodology

In the first part of my thesis, I present the career path of the composers on the one hand – at the recommendation of Anna Dalos, in an integrated form – and the influence of some foreign musicians composing in their immediate environment and also the milieu of the tsarist court in Saint Petersburg in short on the other hand. I thought all of these to be important, because there is no Hungarian work of the life of the composers and the circumstances that led to their becoming of one, while certain segments of these contributed to the development of the style of choral concertos and could be essential factors in the application of techniques.

The second large chapter is about the development of the genre. In this, I present those major processes of the genre which could have resulted in the 18th-century choral concerto as well as the specific Russian genres: *znamenny* and *demestvenny* poliphony, the *partesny*, that is, *partes-singing* and the *kant*. The stylistic characteristics of the latter embedded in the works of Berezovsky, Bortniansky and Vedel.

The major part of the dissertation is composed of the analysis of the works. I examined many concerti of all the three composers from various aspects, and then I summarized my findings. I tried to give a picture of the composer's individual style evolved in the genre in this way and of the fact to what extent the Western European musical stylistic marks or the ancient, authentic Russian musical heritage can be discovered in the works. In what proportion do they mix, how do the career stages of the composers support the presence of all these? How did the composers relate to the text, how deep did they study it? How did the choral art of Bortniansky evolve over time? To what extent is the compositional style of Vedel free in some aspects?

I present some works in detail that I consider outstanding for example, I analyze a major, widely known choral work of Berezovsky and I review the experiment of two Italian composers – playing an essential role in the 18th-century music life – working in this genre.

In the conclusion, I examine the afterlife of the choral concerto and its influence on the subsequent Russian choral arts.

IV. Results

Based on the literature and works I got to know during my work, it can be stated that the genre of the choral concerto was not new in the 18th century. We have known the applied techniques for a long time from the art of the European Renaissance and Baroque composers and the traditions of the Venice School.

The tools of the Russian-type mainly recall the principal of *concerto grosso*. The application of solo is mostly collective, thus in most cases, there is a smaller and a larger choir (groups of soloists and the entire choir), but the contrast is implemented within one choir. What is different from the Western European patterns is that the group of the soloist is mostly *terzetto* based on the traditions of *kant* in which the two upper parts usually move in specific parallels (third, sixth parallel), the bottom part fills the role of the functional bass. The part comparison of *terzetti* is very diversified, and they sometimes receive very virtuosic melodies.

The 18th-century Russian choral concerto is a cyclical genre. It is composed of movements of different tempo and character which were written for various ensembles. The concerto techniques run through all movements which are combined with characteristic Russian melodies and the techniques of the traditional Russian polyphony.

The works of the composers include similar musical characteristics, but at the same time, they unveil the possibilities of the genre in different ways. The art of Berezovsky and Bortniansky is closer to the Western European Baroque and Classical music. The former applies the polyphony more frequently and more naturally, while the latter prefers the classical small forms. The choral compositions of Vedel are much more authentic; compared to the art of his ancestors, they preserve the characteristics of the ancient music more: we can find a more complex rhythm, more opulent ornamentation and unique scales. In addition, the world of his works is advancing, reminiscent of the specific twists of the Romantic era. Most of them belong to the so-called penitential concerti which have a unique tone and structure.

My analyses proved to me my hypothesis that the choral art of Berezovsky, Bortniansky and Vedel is similarly important and forms an unavoidable part of the music in Russia and Ukraine.

V. The documentation of the activity relating to the dissertation

When I started to deal with the topic, I planned to present some choral concerti with my vocal ensemble. Unfortunately, during understanding their works I had to realize that these pieces are very complex and lengthy compared to the capabilities of my youth choir. What was really against the task is the dark tone and the rich voice training typical of the Slavic choirs which my young students cannot implement. Therefore, the presentation of compositions is still awaited. From September this year, I conduct the Male Choir of the Faculty of Music of the University of Debrecen with whom I intend to bill those works of the three composers which were written for this ensemble.

During teaching music theory and style, I make a great use of the analysis of the works supplementing the knowledge acquired of the Baroque and Classical age with this particular field by examining its specific tools of form, tone and harmony.